

provision was removed from H.R. 2357. The bill that we are debating now would no longer "establish standards of access to care for veterans seeking health care from the Department of Veterans Affairs" as is indicated by its title but instead authorizes the Secretary to hire chiropractors and makes certain Filipino World War II veterans living in the United States eligible for VA health care. I am very disappointed that this critical issue in veterans' health care access and element of the President's Task Force recommendations is not being voted on by the House today. However, I am encouraged to hear of the possibility that the Committee will hold a hearing on this very important issue when we return from the August recess. I wholeheartedly support further debate and would look forward to testifying before the Committee.

While disappointed that the appointment standards for the VA have been stripped from this bill, I am pleased that this legislation will give the Secretary of Veterans Affairs the authority to hire chiropractors. Congress has passed legislation numerous times to ensure that veterans have access to chiropractic care and I hope that this bill will clear any final hurdles that have prevented veterans from receiving this type of care.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me today in supporting this legislation that is a small, yet important, step to meeting our commitment to those Americans who made the sacrifice to serve their nation in the armed forces. As future veterans face combat in Iraq, we in Congress must live up to our pledge by providing health care to all veterans, by ensuring that it is accessible, and by fully funding the VA health care system. I urge my colleagues to join me in calling for additional legislation to meet these goals so that we may return to this floor in the near future and step closer to meeting our promise.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, and colleagues, I rise today to urge support for H.R. 2357, legislation which includes a provision from my bill, H.R. 664, that would authorize the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide health care to Filipino World War II veterans who legally reside in the United States.

As my colleagues know, I have been working to restore these benefits for many years. By passing this legislation for Filipino World War II veterans, we are providing a giant step forward in our quest to correct the injustice that was inflicted upon them by the 1946 Congress, shortly after World War II ended.

Over 50 years ago, Filipino soldiers were drafted into service by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. They fought side-by-side with soldiers from the United States mainland, exhibiting great courage at the epic battles of Bataan and Corrigidor. Their participation was critical to the successful outcome of the war in the Far East. It was quite a shock when Congress deprived many of the benefits that they were expecting.

Because these veterans are in their 70s and 80s, their most urgent need is for health care. So I sincerely appreciate the actions of Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman CHRIS SMITH and Ranking Member LANE EVANS, and Chairman BOB SIMMONS and Ranking Member CIRO RODRIGUEZ of the VA Health Subcommittee, as well as of VA Secretary Anthony Principi, to restore VA health care benefits to them.

This bill is also about restoring dignity and honor to these proud veterans. Over fifty years

of injustice burns in the hearts of the Filipino World War II veterans and in the hearts of their sons and daughters. This bill says that we will begin to remedy this historical injustice. We will make good on the promise of America.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 2357, the Veterans Health Care Improvement Act of 2003. This piece of legislation amends Title 38 of the United States Code, to establish standards of access to care for veterans seeking health care from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Mr. Speaker, this piece of legislation is long overdue. This legislation provides new health care benefits to Filipino veterans.

Mr. Speaker, at this time there are thousands of Filipino veterans who have proudly served this country in World War II and still, to this day, aren't eligible to receive health care benefits from Veterans Affairs. That is simply unacceptable. Under this legislation, any individual who is a veteran of the Philippine Commonwealth Army or a former New Philippine Scout living legally in the United States would be eligible for these benefits. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that by 2004, if this legislation is enacted, 9,500 Filipino veterans would qualify for these new benefits.

In addition to providing much over due health care benefits to Filipino veterans, this bill will serve to enhance the quality of chiropractic care offered by VA facilities. Currently, the VA is required to make chiropractic care available to veterans at least one site in each of VA's 21 geographic service areas, however, the bureaucracy often involved in hiring these chiropractors makes it difficult to comply. This legislation makes it easier to hire chiropractors by allowing the VA to appoint and hire the practitioners by specifying that they be treated as other medical professionals like optometrists and podiatrists. This would also allow these medical professionals to become eligible for part-time or temporary employment, educational expense reimbursements, and enhanced protection from malpractice suits.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this worthwhile legislation. It is our duty to provide our veterans with world-class health care for the countless sacrifices that they have made on behalf of our country.

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. SIMMONS. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the Veterans Health Care Improvement Act of 2003.

Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. SIMMONS) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2357, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

The title of the bill was amended so as to read: "A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for the appointment of chiropractors in the Veterans Health Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs and to

provide eligibility for Department of Veterans Affairs health care for certain Filipino World War II veterans residing in the United States."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SIMMONS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on H.R. 2357, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Connecticut?

There was no objection.

□ 1530

NATIONAL CEMETERY EXPANSION ACT OF 2003

Mr. SIMMONS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1516) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a national cemetery for veterans in southeastern Pennsylvania, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 1516

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "National Cemetery Expansion Act of 2003".

SEC. 2. ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW NATIONAL CEMETERIES.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than four years after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in accordance with chapter 24 of title 38, United States Code, shall establish five new national cemeteries. The new cemeteries shall be located in the following locations (those locations having been determined by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to be the most appropriate locations for new national cemeteries):

- (1) Southeastern Pennsylvania.*
- (2) The Birmingham, Alabama, area.*
- (3) The Jacksonville, Florida, area.*
- (4) The Bakersfield, California, area.*
- (5) The Greenville/Columbia, South Carolina, area.*

(b) FUNDS.—Amounts appropriated for the Department of Veterans Affairs for any fiscal year after fiscal year 2003 for Advance Planning shall be available for the purposes of subsection (a).

(c) SITE SELECTION PROCESS.—In determining the specific sites for the new cemeteries required by subsection (a) within the locations specified in that subsection, the Secretary shall solicit the advice and views of representatives of State and local veterans organizations and other individuals as the Secretary considers appropriate.

(d) INITIAL REPORT.—Not later than 120 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report on the establishment of the national cemeteries required by subsection (a). The report shall—

(1) set forth a schedule for the establishment of each such cemetery and an estimate of the costs associated with the establishment of each such cemetery; and

(2) identify the amount of Advance Planning Funds obligated for purposes of this section as of the submission of the report.

(e) ANNUAL REPORTS.—The Secretary shall submit to Congress an annual report on the implementation of this section until the establishment of all five cemeteries is completed and each